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Book Review
Exploitation: From Practice to Theory

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Exploitation: From Practice to Theory
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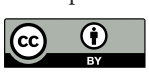

In *Exploitation: From Practice to Theory*, Monique Deveaux and Vida Panitch have assembled a volume with a diverse set of contributors that bridges a number of gaps in exploitation literature. The contributions within make connections not only between empirical and theoretical work, but also between traditional models of exploitation (Marxian and transactional) and their relationship to structural inequalities. In constructing this volume, care was taken to ensure that it was easily approachable. There are three parts—each with four contributions—that, based on one's area of interest, can be read independently of one another or collectively. Additionally, each contribution has been written to stand on its own, without assuming that the reader has background knowledge of the existing literature. Given these features of the volume, it is an excellent starting point not just for the reader interested in understanding the exploitation literature holistically, but also for the reader interested in just one facet. Below I offer a more detailed account of each part of the volume.

The collection's three parts are: Part I: Structural Injustice: Labour, Race, and the Market; Part II: Exploitation and Inequality: Gestational and Care Labour; and Part III: Rethinking the Boundaries and Contexts of Exploitation. I will treat each of these in turn.

Part I contains four contributions dedicated to examining the role that structures play in different exploitative relationships. Richard Miller and Maeve McKeown both take up the exploitation of labor. In "Unequal Bargaining Power and Economic Justice," Miller ultimately argues that—contra Marxists—capitalism has virtues in light of the characteristic unequal bargaining power between employer and employee, provided that employers (those that are "better off") ensure that there is a "system of laws that every citizen could willingly and self-respectfully support in its basic features" (29). The unequal bargaining power between employees and employers is exploitative and calls for correction, though, when employers politically endorse social structures that ensure employees remain inferior so that they (the employers) can continue to experience gains. McKeown takes up and refines a Marxist account of exploitation in "Sweatshop Labour as Global Structural Exploitation," arguing that transactional accounts of exploitation—accounts that identify what's unfair in relationships between two individuals—fail to capture the problematic elements of sweatshop labor. To properly understand and address sweatshop labor we need to recognize not only that Third World and racialized women are the predominant social groups occupying these jobs, but also that there are "*structural conditions* that force these social groups into these jobs: gendered, racialized, and class-based socio-economic hierarchies" (50). Charles W. Mills's "Racial Exploitation and the Payoff of Whiteness" focuses similarly on groups—rather than solely structures or transactions. Mills draws attention to the way prior theorizing fails to properly recognize racial exploitation as distinct from class exploitation. The upshot of this is that discussions about racial justice could be "greatly facilitated," shifting our attention away from

racism and towards "*wrongful white benefit*" (88). Waheed Hussain's "False Parallels" directly contradicts Mills's call for attention to racial groups, arguing that exploitation simply cannot exist in social relationships; exploitation is something that can only occur in markets.

Part II—focused on exploitation in care labor and surrogacy—also offers departures from traditional theories of exploitation by drawing attention to gender inequality. In "Exploitation and Intimate Labour," Vida Panitch argues that it is problematic to collapse theories about commodification and exploitation into one another. This is because commodification analysis rules that all instances of intimate labor are problematic for the same reasons, while exploitation analysis has a "kind of analytic flexibility [that] is crucial for making policies that protect the very real and concrete needs of those whose interests are most at stake in the intimate industries" (120). In "Exploitation, Commodification, and Equality," Anne Phillips argues against Panitch that instances of exploitation and commodification fall along the same continuum of treating others as less than equal. Lynda Lange's "'Women's Work,' the Ethics of Care, and Women's Human Rights" goes beyond the contributions of Phillips and Panitch to understand how one would even begin to assess gendered care for exploitation. Lange concludes that a two-fold approach is needed: (i) recognition that care is labor (as feminist economic theory has historically argued), and (ii) a robust enhancement of women's human rights that would increase "empowerment of women through 'new' rights (whether newly acquired or newly recognized and enforced)" and break the gendered cycle of vulnerability (172). Agomoni Ganguli Mitra's "Exploitation through the Lens of Structural Injustice: Revisiting Global Commercial Surrogacy" offers a conclusion that is pragmatic, similar to Lange's. By examining the reasons women in India choose to be surrogates (e.g., poverty and remaining effects of the caste system), she demonstrates that merely looking at whether surrogacy contracts are fair is not enough to determine whether the women are exploited. Rather, one must also pay attention to structural exploitation. Rather than looking to economic theory to reveal exploitation like Lange, Mitra argues for a transactional-Marxian middle ground.

Part III takes up whether theories of exploitation align with cases we take to be exemplars of exploitation. Heather Widdows's "Exploitation and the Demands of Global Beauty" and Ruth Sample's "What Is Wrong with Price Gouging in the Drug Market?" both reach negative conclusions, deeming traditional theories of exploitation incapable of explaining what has gone wrong in the case of coercive beauty standards and medication price gouging, respectively. In doing so, they demonstrate that something more is needed from our theories of exploitation if they are to adequately characterize those cases that seem most clearly exploitative. The other two contributions in this part offer positive accounts that overcome the shortcomings of traditional theories taken independently. In "Kidney Sales: How Far Do Sellers Exercise Reasoned Freedom? Cases from

Bangladesh," M. Shaiful Islam and Des Gasper share a number of case studies that lead one to the conclusion that Bangladeshi organ donors are engaged in self-exploitation. This is explained by the organ donor's limited capabilities and "restricted agency in a setting of unbearable structural constraints" that prevents them from being able to freely choose to enter a contract with someone that "possesses sufficient freedom and powerful agency" (217). Like Mitra, Islam and Gasper reveal the way that features of transactional and Marxian theories taken together can reach the proper verdicts in real-world cases. Finally, Jeremy Snyder offers an account of exploitation that departs from the others offered and criticized in the volume. In "Exploiting Hope through Unproven Medical Interventions," Snyder argues that the wrong of exploiting hope lies in a failure of a caretaker to fulfill a duty of beneficence to the individual that has entrusted them (the caretaker) with their well-being (254). From this, Snyder reaches the conclusion that "the most effective means of reducing the exploitation of hope for better health from unproven interventions is likely to be counselling from potential customers' medical caregivers," which can serve to offset the self-interests of sellers of unproven medical interventions (256).

While I have reservations with conclusions drawn by a handful of the contributors, I see this as a virtue of the volume rather than a vice. Deveaux and Panitch have composed a volume on exploitation that examines the concept with a range of methods by contributors with diverse viewpoints. Each part contains well-defended conflicting conclusions, giving the reader an opportunity to see both the costs and benefits of adopting a given theory of exploitation. Given the nature of the volume, it seems an appropriate resource not only for faculty and graduate students working on exploitation, but also for upper-level undergraduates requiring an introduction to the topic. In short, Deveaux and Panitch have brought together contributions that both advance the study of exploitation and bring those unfamiliar with the literature up to speed—a balance that is difficult to strike.